

THE AGE

World

Impoverished 13-year-old Indian schoolgirl becomes youngest female to climb Mount Everest

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Lioness heart ... Indian mountaineer Poorna Malavath (left), 13, becomes the youngest female to reach the summit of Mount Everest. Photo: AFP

A 13-year-old **impoverished** Indian schoolgirl, thought to be the youngest female to climb Mount Everest, said on Monday she had never scaled a mountain before setting her sights on the world's highest peak.

Malavath Poorna, daughter of a tribal farm **labourer**, said she reached the 8848-metre peak on May 25 following a difficult and dangerous climb from the Tibetan side of the mountain in China.

Poorna said she and her 16-year-old friend, a member of India's lowest Dalit **caste** previously known as "untouchables", climbed the mountain with ten Nepalese guides before hoisting the Indian flag.



Poorna Malavath uses a radio during her ascent of Mount Everest on the Tibetan side of the mountain in China. Photo: AFP

1. What do you think **impoverished** means?
2. Why do you think the author has included the fact that the girl is from a very poor background? Why is this important?
3. Where is Mount Everest located? (see map below if you aren't sure)

"I started to train for Everest last September, my parents and my instructors were very encouraging," Poorna said in Kathmandu before heading home to India.

She spent around seven months training on rocky hills and later on icy terrain in India's Himalayan Ladakh region, learning to cope with altitudes and bitter cold - a world away from her home in the tropical southern state of Telangana.

The 52-day-long expedition to Everest was made possible after an Indian government-run welfare group sponsored the teenager, whose father belongs to an indigenous tribe and earns just 35,000 rupees (\$640) a year.

The petite schoolgirl said she was a confident climber and only felt nervous the day she made her final push to the summit.



Poorna's climb has since been recognised by the Himalayan Database, considered the most authoritative record of mountaineering in the region.

Kathmandu-based Jeevan Shrestha, who assists mountaineering expert Elizabeth Hawley, with the database, said: "Poorna is the youngest female to summit Everest. It is a very rare achievement."

Most climbers attempt the peak from the Nepalese side - the easiest and most popular route - but authorities in Kathmandu do not grant climbing licences for Everest to anyone under 16.

Nepal's Everest climbing season effectively shut down this year after an **avalanche** killed 16 **sherpas** and sparked a labour dispute that prompted climbers to abandon their **expeditions**.

In 2010, 13-year-old American Jordan Romero claimed to have set the record for being the youngest climber to summit Everest, also making the ascent from Tibet.

His **feat** provoked criticism from the mountaineering community, who questioned whether he was mature enough to make the decision to climb.

The Indian teenager brushed off such concerns, saying "I am glad I got the chance to climb. If I am fit enough, why should anyone stop me from climbing?"

"I wanted to prove that people from my background, tribals, can do anything they want," she said.

She said she planned to join India's police force after finishing her education and climbing a few more peaks.

"Right now, I can't wait to go home. The most challenging aspect of Everest was eating all that packaged food, soup and muesli - I can't wait to get home and eat my mother's fried chicken and rice."

4. What does the term "a world away" mean?
5. What can you infer from this paragraph about the climate where Poorna is from?

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DISCUSSION

Vocabulary

Impoverished, labourer, caste, avalanche, Sherpa (s), expedition, feat

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think that a 13 year old should be allowed to climb mountains such as Mount Everest? Why or why not?
2. What pieces of information in the article tell us of the dangers that Poorna faced or could have faced during her climb?
3. Was Poorna trying to prove something to herself and to others by taking part in this climb? If so, what was she trying to prove or what was the message she was trying to send?